# Identify all the internal ecclesiastical power struggles and doctrinal conflicts in Christendom from 100 A.D. to 313 A.D.

Between 100 A.D. and 313 A.D., the Christian Church (Christendom) underwent a critical period of definition, transforming from a loose network of house churches into a structured, hierarchical institution. This evolution was driven largely by the need to resolve internal power struggles and define orthodoxy against competing doctrines.

The conflicts of this era can be categorized into two main arenas: **Doctrinal Conflicts** (battles over theology and the nature of God/Christ) and **Ecclesiastical Power Struggles** (battles over church authority, discipline, and ritual uniformity).

## I. Doctrinal Conflicts: Defining Orthodoxy

During this period, the church lacked a centralized enforcement mechanism or a unified canon of Scripture. Consequently, diverse theological interpretations flourished, forcing "proto-orthodox" leaders (like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus) to define the boundaries of the faith.

### 1. Gnosticism (c. 100–300s A.D.)

Gnosticism was the most pervasive intellectual threat to the early church. It was not a single sect but a diverse movement (including Sethians, Valentinians, and Basilideans) that taught salvation through secret knowledge (*gnosis*) rather than faith.

- **The Conflict:** Gnostics generally held a dualistic worldview, believing the material world was evil and created by a lesser, ignorant deity (the Demiurge), often identified with the God of the Old Testament. They rejected the physical incarnation of Jesus, leading to **Docetism**, the belief that Christ's body was an illusion and he did not truly suffer or die.[1] [2]
- **Ecclesiastical Response:** Bishops like Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180 A.D.) wrote massive refutations (e.g., *Against Heresies*), arguing for "Apostolic Succession" to prove that the true teachings of Jesus were public, not secret, and had been passed down openly to the bishops of the church.[2]

### 2. Marcionism (c. 144 A.D.)

Marcion of Sinope, a wealthy shipowner, created a rival church structure that arguably posed a greater institutional threat than Gnosticism because of its organization.

- **The Conflict:** Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament (a wrathful, legalistic creator) was a different, inferior being from the God of the New Testament (the Father of

Jesus, a God of pure love). He rejected the entire Old Testament and heavily edited the New, accepting only ten letters of Paul and a truncated Gospel of Luke.[1] [2]

- **Ecclesiastical Response:** The church in Rome excommunicated Marcion in 144 A.D. This conflict forced the orthodox church to accelerate the formation of its own New Testament canon and to firmly affirm the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.[3]

### 3. Montanism (The "New Prophecy") (c. 156/172 A.D.)

While Gnostics threatened doctrine, Montanism threatened church order and authority. Originated by Montanus and his prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla in Phrygia.

- **The Conflict:** Montanists claimed the Holy Spirit was speaking new, authoritative revelations through them that superseded or equaled the Apostles. They practiced extreme asceticism and rigorism, forbidding second marriages and seeking martyrdom.[2] [1]
- **Ecclesiastical Response:** The bishops perceived this as a threat to the closed canon of Scripture and the authority of the hierarchy. Synods were held to excommunicate Montanists, asserting that the age of public revelation had ended with the Apostles.

### 4. Monarchianism & Early Trinitarian Debates (c. 190–300 A.D.)

As the church defended monotheism while worshipping Jesus, two "Monarchian" errors arose, attempting to preserve the "monarchy" (oneness) of God.

- **Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism):** Taught by Theodotus of Byzantium (excommunicated by Pope Victor I, c. 190 A.D.) and later Paul of Samosata (Bishop of Antioch, condemned 268 A.D.). They claimed Jesus was a mere man who was "adopted" by God at his baptism due to his supreme virtue.[4] [5] [6]
- **Modalistic Monarchianism (Sabellianism):** Taught by Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. They argued the Father, Son, and Spirit were just different "modes" or masks worn by the one God, rather than distinct persons. Tertullian famously wrote *Against Praxeas* to refute this, helping coin the Latin terminology for the Trinity.[6] [4]

### 5. The Alogi & Elkesaites (Late 2nd–3rd Century)

- **The Alogi:** A group in Asia Minor (c. 170 A.D.) that rejected the Gospel of John and the Apocalypse (Revelation) because they opposed the *Logos* doctrine and the prophecy-centered Montanists who relied on these texts. They attributed John's writings to the heretic Cerinthus.[7] [8]
- **The Elkesaites:** A Jewish-Christian baptist sect (c. 100–400 A.D.) claiming a new revelation from a giant angel and a "hidden power" (Elxai). They rejected the divinity of Christ and Paul’s letters, blending Gnosticism with Jewish legalism.[9] [10] [11]

## II. Ecclesiastical Power Struggles: Authority & Discipline

These conflicts were battles over *who* had the power to decide church practice and valid sacraments.

### 1. The Quartodeciman (Easter) Controversy (c. 155–195 A.D.)

A struggle over liturgical uniformity and the authority of Rome vs. ancient local traditions.

- **The Conflict:** The churches of Asia Minor (led by Polycarp and later Polycrates) celebrated Pascha (Easter) on the 14th of Nisan (Quartodeciman), regardless of the day of the week, following Johannine tradition. The Roman church and others celebrated it on the following Sunday.[12] [13]
- **The Struggle:** In 155 A.D., Polycarp and Pope Anicetus agreed to disagree peacefully. However, in roughly 195 A.D., **Pope Victor I** attempted to excommunicate the entire province of Asia for refusing to adopt the Roman Sunday practice.
- **Outcome:** Irenaeus of Lyons intervened, rebuking Victor for his lack of charity, and the excommunication was largely ignored or withdrawn, but it set a precedent for Rome's assertiveness.[14] [15]

### 2. The Schisms of the "Lapsi" (Rigorism vs. Mercy)

Severe persecutions (Decius in 250, Diocletian in 303) created a crisis: what to do with the *lapsi* (those who denied the faith to save their lives) who wanted to return?

- **The Novatian Schism (251 A.D.):** Following the Decian persecution, Novatian, a brilliant Roman priest, argued that the church had no power to forgive apostasy (idolatry), murder, or adultery. When the lenient Cornelius was elected Bishop of Rome, Novatian declared himself the true bishop (antipope), creating a "Church of the Pure" (Cathari) that lasted for centuries.[16] [17] [18]
- **The Meletian Schism (306 A.D.):** In Egypt, Bishop Meletius of Lycopolis refused to accept the lenient restoration guidelines of Peter of Alexandria regarding the *lapsi* during the Great Persecution. Meletius ordained his own clergy, creating a parallel church structure in Egypt that plagued the church into the Nicene era.[19] [20] [21]

### 3. The Rebaptism Controversy (255–257 A.D.)

A major clash between the two most powerful bishops in the West: **Cyprian of Carthage** and **Stephen I of Rome**.

- **The Conflict:** Cyprian and the North African councils held that baptism performed by heretics (like Novatianists) was invalid; thus, converts from heresy must be "rebaptized." Stephen I argued that baptism was valid regardless of the minister's purity, as long as it was done in the name of the Trinity.
- **Power Struggle:** Stephen threatened excommunication, asserting the primacy of the "Chair of Peter." Cyprian resisted, arguing for the collegial equality of bishops. The dispute was only paused by their respective martyrdoms.[22] [23] [24]

### 4. Origins of the Donatist Schism (311–313 A.D.)

Arising immediately after the Great Persecution, this was the final major schism before the peace of Constantine.

- **The Conflict:** In Carthage, a group of rigorists refused to accept the new bishop, Caecilian, because he was consecrated by a bishop alleged to be a *traditor* (one who handed over Scriptures to Romans). They elected a rival bishop, Majorinus (later succeeded by Donatus).
- **Outcome:** This created a massive, enduring schism in North Africa that Constantine eventually had to mediate (unsuccessfully) shortly after 313 A.D.[25] [26] [27]

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